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A Man Without a Job is a Dead Man: The Meaning of Work and Welfare in the Lives of Young Men

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Little is known about the use of welfare by young men as most research and debate have concentrated on the use of welfare by families headed by single women. This research includes young men in this debate by examining the personal characteristics, events that precipitated their use, why they exited, and the barriers they faced in obtaining employment. Data are from qualitative interviews of 20 young men who resided in Madison, Wisconsin. Findings suggest that these men use General Assistance as a type of unemployment insurance between jobs. Policy, program and research recommendations are made regarding the need for assistance in improving the level of human capital and locating and retaining employment for poor men.

It is surprising, in this era of fiscal restraint and concern over welfare, that an information gap exists in our understanding of General Assistance (GA), a state and/or locally financed income maintenance program for needy persons who do not qualify for economic assistance under the federal programs of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI). In addition to using GA to provide benefits to poor single adults and childless couples, administrators have historically used it as interim support for individuals awaiting SSI verification, for two-parent families who do not meet the employment test for the AFDC-Unemployed Parent program, and for poor women in their first two trimesters of pregnancy. There are no federal mandates or regulations that require states to implement GA or that govern its administration.

One consequence of this lack of federal involvement is that some states have no GA program, and those that do differ considerably in their administration, eligibility requirements, and benefit levels. State and local expenditures for GA programs in 1989 ranged from a high of \$693 million in New York state to just under \$2,000 in South Carolina. Only 38 states and the District of Columbia had either an ongoing or a short-term (i.e., 60 to 90 days) income maintenance program that was more extensive than a one-time Emergency Assistance grant (Lewin/ICF and James Bell Associates, 1990).

Benefits are minimal and they vary; they may be cash assistance, vendor payments, or in-kind benefits such as firewood or bus tickets. Before its elimination in 1995, the GA program in Wisconsin had a statutory minimum benefit of \$175 per month. Counties could adjust this amount upward to account for differences in housing costs (Hinz, 1989). However, even with this adjustment, benefits did not provide enough to meet the average cost of housing; the average GA benefit in Milwaukee was \$205 in 1992, while the fair market rent for an efficiency apartment was \$359 (Nichols and Porter, 1995).

One benchmark for the benefit level is to compare it to the minimum wage. A man who worked full time at a job paying minimum wage (\$4.25 an hour) in Milwaukee in the early 1990s would gross \$731 a month, more than three times the amount he would receive from GA. Unlike recipients of AFDC, recipients of GA typically do not receive Medicaid or medical assistance. However, they do qualify for food stamps if their net monthly income is less than 130 percent of the federal poverty guidelines. The maximum monthly food stamp benefit for one person was \$112 in 1993, bringing the benefit package for a GA recipient up to \$317 (U.S. House of Representatives, 1994). This is still only 43 percent of the monthly full-time gross wage. With such a meager benefit, an important question is why anyone would use this program.

This research examines the personal characteristics, backgrounds, and employment of young men who participated in a GA program. Using information obtained from interviews conducted during 1993 and 1994 in Madison, Wisconsin, it explores the events that precipitated their use of GA and describes the

barriers they faced in obtaining employment. The first section of this paper briefly discusses employment opportunities available to persons with limited education and criminal activity as a substitute for wage labor among young men. The second section details the methods used to gather the sample; the third reports the results of those interviews. The last section explores policy implications and suggests areas for future research.

The Labor Market Dynamics of Young Men

The perception that a growing number of young men are chronically unemployed and engaging in crime has alarmed both policymakers and the general public. How do unemployment and crime influence the use of and exit from GA? This section discusses the employment opportunities of low-skilled and poorly educated men in today's labor market and explores the connection with their criminal activity.

Employment Opportunities and Education

Many GA recipients lack a high school diploma, and a majority have sporadic work histories (Dalke and Savage, 1975; Department of Public Welfare, 1979; Stagner and Richman, 1985; Wolfhagen, 1987; Kost, 1990; Hansen, 1992b). This combination of limited education and lack of consistent employment history places the typical GA recipient at a disadvantage in today's labor market. Recent evidence suggests that employers are hiring more college graduates, leaving those with less education, regardless of the length of their employment histories, unemployed or underemployed (Murphy and Welch, 1993; Topel, 1994).

In addition, many areas of the country experienced a severe cutback in the employment opportunities for low-skilled workers throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s. The decline in manufacturing and other industrial sectors was accompanied by an increase in service-sector jobs, primarily part time at minimum wage, and without health benefits (Blackburn et al., 1990; Bound and Holzer, 1993; Harrison and Bluestone, 1988; Kasarda, 1989). Blank (1995) notes that the demand for less-skilled workers declined faster than the size of the low-skilled work force. Employers have hired more-skilled workers rather than low-skilled workers even though they demand higher wages. The increase in

the incidence of low earnings over the last decade was greatest for minority men and occurred regardless of their educational attainment (Acs and Danziger, 1991; Jencks and Mayer, 1990; Karoly, 1992). Clearly the proximity to employment opportunities and the level of individual human capital affect work history.

In earlier work (Kost, 1994), I found no relationship between the unemployment rate and use of or exit from GA, but the results suggest a strong relationship between recent work history and exit. The average recipient who worked more than 12 weeks the year before he exited GA had a 73 percent probability of exiting GA; the average man who did not work had only a 30 percent probability of exit.

It is unknown how extensively cash assistance through the GA program is used as a substitute for benefits from Unemployment Insurance (UI) during times of job loss. However, the size of the GA rolls in an area is associated with the level of unemployment not covered by Unemployment Insurance (Kasper, 1968). This suggests that the use of GA may be related to the availability of employment at a given wage covered by UI. Administrative changes in the UI program have reduced access to coverage for many workers since the early years of the Reagan Administration, either through the increase in state discretion on the types of employment that are covered or the length of time needed in the work force to qualify for coverage. For example, nearly 75 percent of unemployed workers were covered by UI at the height of the recession in the mid 1970s. Today less than 30 percent of unemployed workers receive UI benefits in an average month (Nichols and Shapiro, 1995). This lack of UI coverage may be particularly problematic for poor workers who are less likely to have any savings to rely on while they search for new employment. GA programs may also provide valuable job training and placement services that assist recipients in competing for jobs. Unfortunately, research in this area focuses primarily on the work effort of female heads of households—women receiving AFDC, who have additional constraints and needs in regards to child care, insurance, and wage rates—rather than on single men.

Crime as a Substitute for Work

In exploring the use of GA as an alternative to employment for young men, it is important also to examine the role of crime

as a substitute for wage labor and the potential influence it may have on GA use. Young men make up a disproportionate share of those involved in the criminal justice system. Nearly one-fifth of the current U.S. prison population is made up of men between 18 and 24 years of age (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1994). Receipt of GA could act as a cover for illegal income or as a safety net for an offender coming out of prison while he searches for employment.

Although, as noted earlier, there is no substantive support for a link between the unemployment rate and criminal activity of young men, the labor participation rate is closely linked to the crime rate in an area (Freeman, 1983). The market incentives for crime may influence a young man's decision to delay employment. Individuals who expect to earn more from street crime than from a legitimate job and who are neither in school nor employed are significantly more likely to report criminal activity (Viscusi, 1986). This suggests that the lack of low-skilled employment opportunities in low-income neighborhoods may influence a young man's participation in the underground economy (Anderson, 1990). There is evidence that some adolescent males from low-income central-city neighborhoods substitute economic crime for legal employment. Sullivan (1989a) finds that a majority of adolescents in his study substituted "economic" crime for wages. He defined "economic" crime as criminal activity that has few serious consequences and, therefore, is considered a viable method of making money; these activities include drug dealing, picking pockets, and auto theft. Economic crime decreased when participation in the labor market increased for adolescents in his study. These youth almost always increased criminal activity after being laid off from a job (Sullivan, 1989a).

In addition, there exists a relationship between deviant behavior as a child, later involvement in crime, and problems related to employment. Male truants are more likely to drop out of school and subsequently earn less as adults than boys who were never or rarely truant (Dryfoss, 1990). These findings suggest that early entrance into deviant behavior may have long-term impacts on education and subsequently limit the employment opportunities of young men.

One other factor related to GA use is that the criminal history of a job applicant may deter an employer from hiring him. Many employers view the criminal record of a potential employee as a

signal of poor worker quality and prefer to hire someone without a criminal record (Grogger, 1992).

Both the use of GA and exit from it are significantly related to the number of incidents in the criminal justice system reported by recipients. Using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), Kost (1994) found that young men who report three or more encounters with the criminal justice system are more likely to use GA—and also to exit from it—than those who report no history of incarceration, probation, or parole. The combination of criminal history and a previous record of employment is highly predictive of exit from GA. Men who worked 12 weeks the year before exiting and who report three or more incidents in the criminal justice system have an 82 percent probability of exiting GA, compared to just 41 percent for men who report similar criminal histories but lack the employment experience.

Data Collection and Analysis

A qualitative approach to research provides a unique opportunity to study the personal circumstances that lead a young man to use welfare by allowing the respondent to express in his own words his life history, the meaning of events, and opinions about what influences him. Between September 1993 and June 1994, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted by the researcher with 20 men at two neighborhood centers in Madison, Wisconsin. Participants had to meet the following three criteria: (1) be men between the ages of 18 and 30; (2) have received General Assistance at least once; and (3) be considered able-bodied, i.e., not eligible for SSI, at the time of their initial receipt. Participants were recruited through the use of informational flyers and informal contacts from center staff and social workers who thought that they would meet the criteria for inclusion in the study. In addition to these sampling strategies, "snowballing" was also used, i.e., respondents were asked to tell other eligible men about the study. Participants agreed to sign a statement of informed consent and to have their interview tape-recorded.

Bias was introduced in the selection of this sample from at least three sources. Two were through the use of neighborhood centers as distribution points for the flyers. Firstly, not all young

men who use GA utilize the services and/or resources of neighborhood centers; these may include free meals, food pantries, free clothing, or support services. Thus only those men who used or knew someone who used these services learned about the survey. Secondly, these neighborhood centers were located in areas with little ethnic diversity. Respondents were obtained from only two of the seven centers that agreed to participate, only one Hispanic respondent could be obtained for this research and no Asian respondents were obtained. Staff and social workers in the two centers easily identified individuals who met the selection criteria and actively recruited respondents. In contrast, staff in the other five centers were unable to identify anyone, even though they originally thought they could because the demographic characteristics of the seven neighborhoods were similar in poverty level, welfare use, number of single-parent households, and prevalence of crime.

The third source of selection bias was introduced because of a \$20.00 stipend offered to each participant. Further, respondents were self-selected—they needed to contact the researcher and set up an appointment.

This paper addresses two primary questions. The first is: Why would an able-bodied young man use GA when he could make more money at a minimum-wage job? Models of welfare use differ in the reasons they suggest for men's use of GA. For example, one model posits that men are socialized to use welfare by their families or that they are seeking an alternative to work. In these cases, GA provides them with enough income to get by. In contrast, another model posits that a man uses GA as a form of unemployment insurance when he cannot find a job.

The second question seeks to go beyond these models of welfare use in order to explore the psychological and emotional context of the lives of young male recipients. It asks: What is the meaning of GA in the lives of the young men who use it? Is it an embarrassment, or a way of "getting over" on society? Or is GA a last resort, an alternative to homelessness?

Each participant was asked to describe his life, including his education, family structure and support system, criminal and employment histories, length of welfare use, and the reasons for use and exit from GA. In particular, attention was focused on the

barriers that respondents perceived in obtaining and retaining employment and on their perception of themselves as welfare recipients. What was the meaning of GA in their lives? What role did it play and how did they feel about themselves when they received it?

Overview of Findings

This section describes the basic demographic characteristics of men in the sample, including information regarding their families of origin, and explores their employment and welfare use.

Table 1 provides information on the basic demographic characteristics of participants. Men ranged in age from 18 to 30; 17 of the 20 respondents were minorities and 13 were fathers. Eleven respondents reported that a member of their family used welfare: nine men reported that their parents had received AFDC while they were growing up; two reported GA use by a family member—one by his grandmother, the other by his brother; two men reported that their sisters and their mothers also received AFDC.

More than half the men reported spending at least some time in a single-parent home, but only one man reported being in foster care as a child. Also, more than half of these young men reported that they had been homeless for more than a week at some point in their lives—a majority of them more than once.

The length of GA receipt ranged from two days to two years. The average length of time for which respondents reported receiving GA was 7.5 months. This figure is strongly influenced by five men who reported having received assistance for more than seven months. Three of these five had received assistance for two years, one for 18 months, and one for 12 months.

The level of human capital among a majority of respondents appears to be low. Six of the 20 respondents had neither a high school diploma nor GED; eight had a high school diploma or GED, but nearly one-half of these eight men had completed their high school education while in prison or in a juvenile detention center. Of those men who had more than 12 years of education, only one had graduated from college.

Fourteen of the 20 respondents had spent time in a juvenile detention center, jail, or prison. Sentences ranged from one day to

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of GA Recipients

<i>Average Age</i>	26 years
<i>Ethnicity</i>	
African American	15
Caucasian	3
Hispanic	1
Native American	1
<i>Own Marital Status</i>	
never-married	17
married	1
divorced/separated	2
<i>Paternity</i>	
no children	7
one child	6
two children	6
> two children	1
<i>Ever in jail</i>	14
<i>Ever homeless</i>	11
<i>Average GA spell</i>	7.5 months
<i>Number of GA spells</i>	
one	11
two	6
three	2
four	1
<i>Education</i>	
≤ 8 years	1
9–11 years	5
HS diploma or GED	8
> 12 years	6
<i>Parental Marital Status</i>	
never-married	3
married	8
divorced/separated	8
widowed	1
<i>Parental use of welfare</i>	9
N = 20	

seven years; offenses ranged in seriousness from disorderly conduct and shoplifting to auto theft, carrying a concealed weapon, and attempted murder. For a majority of the men, time in an institution had been preceded by multiple police contacts.

Only three of the 20 men interviewed had grown up in middle class families. All the men in this study had either personally experienced or had a family member who had experienced some form of violence. These men reported such experiences as being homeless as children, living with alcoholic parents, and the murder of siblings. Many respondents noted an absence in their lives of people who achieved their goals or could serve as role models. One 28-year-old stated, "There was a lot of gangs, drug dealing going around, fighting, violence, lot of robbing and stealing Everybody had their own way of life. They believed in taking." Men who lived with their fathers generally spoke of the help and support they received from them and the importance of their fathers in shaping their lives. In contrast, those whose fathers had abandoned them expressed feelings of anger and grief.

Having been in circumstances with few advantages, a majority of these men were unable to turn to a member of their family for financial support. However, most men stated that they received emotional support from a parent, grandparent, or sibling.

The World of Work

As Table 1 illustrates, a majority of these young men had a history in the criminal justice system and limited levels of education. In addition, they reported sporadic work histories, primarily in the low-wage labor market. All of these men had worked primarily in low-skilled jobs in the service sector, as custodians or janitors, mail room or library clerks, and cooks, or as manual laborers for maintenance or moving companies. Few had ever earned more than \$7.00 an hour. Only one man had worked for an employer for more than two years; among the others, a majority of the jobs they had held had lasted less than six months. A majority of respondents identified a connection between their limited education, work histories, and, when present, their criminal records. They expressed concern over their lack of substantive and consistent work history. Their most frequent responses, when asked why they had left a job, were that they had been fired due to

high absenteeism or had quit because they were having "trouble" with a supervisor or other employee.

Besides their limited work histories, men identified additional barriers to employment: not having a telephone or car, or being homeless. One 30-year-old man who had been homeless several times stated, "If you find something like McDonald's, and you are homeless, how are you going to keep it? Because you can't deal with hygiene . . . you need to shave, you need to bathe on a regular basis."

Some men argued that their lack of employment and use of welfare were due to racial discrimination in the labor market. For example, a 28-year-old man who had worked as a janitor in another state for eight years stated:

I have a good work record. . . . Maybe they got a problem because I am a black person. I fit all qualifications to work anytime . . . I've been working all my life. . . . I don't understand it. . . . What qualifications do you need to be a janitor? Anyone can clean if you tell them. You can show me something once, and I can do it from there on. You ain't got to show me no more. . . . I think it is discrimination. That's what I'd be thinking.

Others blamed the environment in which they grew up:

I think it's the environment. When you are around a lot of people that don't work, that's another thing that might rub off to you and make you don't want to work. If you are around a lot of people that's working and doing something positive, you say, "Well hey . . . I'm going to try." And I've been working. (28-year-old)

Still others blamed themselves and their own lack of motivation:

I guess I pretty much got myself into it. What led to that—I got fired from one job, I guess, and it was hard to start over again, and I just took part-time jobs and this and that to make ends meet. . . . I just didn't push myself enough, I guess. (30-year-old)

Many of the men who reported involvement in the criminal justice system believed that their criminal backgrounds directly affected their work experience and their current employment opportunities. For example, a 26-year-old respondent who noted that his contacts with police began when he was 11 years old said that, over a ten-year period, he had been in detention or jail

more than at home. There was little opportunity between these spells to work. An 18-year-old former cocaine dealer who had just applied for his first "real" job noted that, although he had been fairly successful in his former "occupation," he was unfamiliar with the skills needed to be successful in the legal labor market. "I had to fill out applications, and I do not know how to fill out one. So I didn't know what I was doing. I felt really stupid."

Men who had spent time in a juvenile detention center, jail, or prison stated that it had affected not only their education and employment but also their attitude towards life, making them more determined to "get it right this time." Some of these men expressed frustration at having served their time and wanting to have a job, but being unable find someone to hire them. These men felt that their prison experience acted as a barrier to employment. For example:

When you're an ex-convict, it is extremely hard . . . I mean it. I mean it ain't like you can just go and get hired, making \$8.00 an hour. When you're an ex-convict, and you get called for an interview, and these people ask you "Where were you incarcerated?" and me not wanting to lie to them, I want them to know. They say "Well, we'll call you." I never get the call. (28-year-old)

Others stated that they just needed to keep trying and that eventually someone would be willing to hire them :

I had my mind to just go when it came time to get work. I am going to get work. I am going to put whatever down on here [application], what happened. If they call me, they call me. If not, I'll just go ahead onto another until I find something. . . . I think if they need help, they are going to hire me anyway. Prison or not prison. (23-year-old)

Men who acknowledged using illegal drugs or abusing alcohol also saw themselves as being responsible for their sporadic work histories. Some felt that much of the trouble they had with supervisors or from high absenteeism were the result of their substance abuse. One man, a 27-year-old recovering alcoholic, had never held a job for more than a year.

I have had lots of jobs. I think I have had about 25 jobs, believe it or not, or maybe a little more. . . . I really regret alcohol becoming a

problem during that period . . . eventually making my life become such a mess that I couldn't hold down a job in terms of health issues.

Another had been addicted to crack:

When I started using crack I was 17 . . . it not only affected it [job]; it caused me to terminate the job because I didn't have time to go put in 12 and 13 hours, like I was doing. The crack was telling, "No, we stay at home tonight; we go get us something to do." (28-year-old)

All of these men expressed a strong desire to work, to support themselves. While they admitted to making mistakes that had made their lives harder, most felt that they had learned valuable lessons and just needed another chance. As one 24-year-old man who had been out of work for about six months stated, "I hate to be unemployed . . . a man without a job is a dead man to me . . . and every man needs a job . . . you need to be productive in some kind of way."

Why Welfare and What Does It Mean?

Reasons that men decided to apply for GA included losing a job and being unable to obtain another, being homeless (as a result of losing a job or ending a relationship), getting out of prison, and family pressure to contribute income to the household (welfare provided "free money"). Thirteen of the 20 respondents stated that they were unable to find a job and used GA only until they could get one; one of these men had just gotten out of prison; two were homeless and GA gave them enough money to get a place to stay. One 18-year-old quit his job and went on GA so that he could return to high school and still buy diapers for his baby. The remaining seven men admitted to using GA as an alternative to work; three of these seven used it to supplement their family's AFDC benefit.

These thirteen respondents who applied for GA because they could not find work did so because they felt they could no longer survive without it.

[A] few years I worked there before I lost the job. And then it was after that I had trouble finding a job, and it just takes a couple to three weeks before you even get a check. And I had nothing to live off of. (30-year-old)

And:

The only reason I am on it [GA] is because I had a problem, fell back, lost my job, I had a good job, I liked it and everything. But I went to jail. They couldn't hold that position open for no three weeks. So Bam! Lost my job. Then that's where welfare came in. I'm staying at a place and had to pay rent. (28-year-old)

Finally, from a 28-year-old man who had been on GA twice, each time for only one month:

Because I wasn't working and didn't have another job. So I usually get on, get me one check, have enough to get me an apartment. . . . I don't even like welfare. I prefer not to be on it. But with me being in the situation I am in, that's the only reason why I get it.

Many men reported panhandling, selling their plasma, sweeping store fronts, or doing odd home repairs to survive before applying for welfare. These men reported difficulty in surviving on GA but felt that it gave them enough to prevent them from becoming homeless. A majority of these men lived with roommates, either with strangers or with significant others. The others lived in single rooms they rented by the week or month.

Nine men had used GA more than once. Of this group, only one had received assistance for more than five months. Although a few men had lost their eligibility for failure to follow the reporting rules, most left the rolls through employment. The following explanation from a 24-year-old about leaving GA was typical, "I think welfare . . . you use it to get on your feet, and then you should get off and look for better things."

A majority of men expressed shame and embarrassment about being on General Assistance. A few stated that although they received food stamps, they were too embarrassed to use them and would ask their women friends to buy food with the stamps for them. Even though many men commented that receiving GA was a necessary part of the social safety net, the social stigma attached to its use was high.

People treat you like you are low. I mean you're poverty. You had to borrow. Everybody look at you like—you know. I feel that way about myself . . . it is really depressing. I hate it. (28-year-old)

And:

I felt lower, lower than people, just smaller than they were. Just walking up to that place [the welfare office], I felt that I'd hate to be on this stuff [welfare]. . . . I just felt ashamed of myself really. (30-year-old)

Finally,

I didn't want nobody to know. Anybody would ask me, I'd be making up lies after lie. . . . So just to keep face and keep people from "downtalking" you, I lied, just to keep my friends, and just to keep things like they were. (24-year-old)

Men noted the importance of the job training program and the welfare workers in the county who assisted them in finding work. One 25-year-old man whose GA case worker helped him get a job with a state agency remarked that his worker just would not "give up" on him and that it felt good to have someone believe in him. The following response was typical:

What I got out of it was it kept me at it; otherwise I might not have worked so hard finding a job. . . . They were really supportive . . . they had phones there you could use . . . [and they] let employers leave messages for people in the program. . . . I did find a job (27-year old)

Others noted the help they received with creating résumés and improving job interview skills.

I did go and apply for a few jobs, and nothing really worked out. So I went back on General Assistance, and through that, they were actually very helpful in helping me to end up working. (27-year-old)

As one 30-year-old said, "It refreshed my mind a bit on how to go out and get a job." These men stated that they did not know how they would have survived without GA, either because their families were also poor and were unable to help them, or because they could no longer turn to those families for financial support because of their histories of drug or alcohol abuse. They felt that GA gave them an opportunity to look for a job and change the direction of their lives.

Discussion

This research informs the literature on welfare use by providing information on the role GA plays in the lives of male recipients. It addresses two primary questions.

1. *Why would a young, able-bodied man use GA?*

Fifteen of the 20 respondents used GA for seven months or less. Thirteen of these 20 used it as a last resort, either because they could not find a job, were homeless and needed it to get established, or had just been released from prison. Although a few men felt that they had a right to assistance because they were citizens in need of help, most expressed embarrassment and shame about their use.

All the men in this study reported work histories that were interrupted by jail spells, homelessness, a move to another area of the country, or layoff because they had failed to follow directions or to show up for work. The length of time respondents had held jobs varied from one day to eight years. Men in this study reported experiencing persistent poverty as children—17 of the 20 respondents had grown up in poverty. Twelve men had grown up in a single-parent home, and nine were members of families that had received AFDC while they were children. McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) found that men who grow up in a single-parent family are more likely to drop out of school and to be idle as young adults than are those from two-parent families. They note that these outcomes are highly related to the income and residential mobility of the family. Unfortunately, while they measure the adolescent birth patterns of women in these families they do not discuss those of men. Thirteen of the 20 men in this study were fathers, and only one was married to the mother of his child. Most of these births had occurred while the men were adolescents.

Fourteen of the 20 respondents had spent time in a juvenile detention center, jail or prison. One 28-year-old man had started shoplifting when he was 11 in order to get clothes or money. The longest time he had spent in detention or jail was a month, although he estimated that he had been picked up by the police between 60 and 70 times. Further research is needed to fully explore and understand the influence of poverty, parental status,

and criminal involvement on the welfare use and employment of young men.

2. What does welfare mean for young men?

A majority of respondents expressed a strong preference for work; however, they felt GA was a necessary part of the social safety net. For 13 respondents, as already noted, it was a last resort. Three of the seven men who used GA as an alternative to work had just turned 18 and were living in families that received AFDC. These three men used GA to supplement the family's AFDC benefit. When they realized they could get more money from a job than they could from GA, they went off welfare and found minimum-wage jobs. This was their first experience in the labor market.

Respondents in this research who had received GA more than once, in both the current county and another state, were asked about differences between programs. These respondents consistently stated that they received substantive and crucial employment-related support from the current county's GA program, including positive feedback on their résumés and interviewing strategies, and access to job opportunities. After receiving this help, most were able to obtain and retain employment. All felt more confident about their ability to obtain a job. More information is needed on programs that include employment-related services for this population.

A majority of respondents in the present research had low levels of both human capital, in the form of education and basic job skills, and social capital, in the form of connections to the labor market through family or friends. No one factor, but rather a combination of internal and external circumstances, brought them to their decision to use GA. Future research is needed to fully explore the connection between the level of human and social capital and the welfare use of men.

Seventeen of the 20 men in this study grew up in poverty, and as adults they have remained poor. The intergenerational poverty of men has not received the same level of attention as that of women, despite its influence on the ability of fathers to support their children, which in turn influences childhood outcomes. Research indicates that about one-third of fathers whose

incomes were less than \$5,000 at the time paternity was established continue to have below poverty level incomes three years later. The younger the man was at the time of paternity, the more likely he is to have a low income (Meyer, 1993).

Sullivan (1989a, b; 1994) argues that young men should be included in discussions of solutions to poverty and welfare dependence in order to encourage and support their connection to family and community. There are few opportunities for job training available to men outside the welfare system, and the current round of welfare reforms at the state and federal levels excludes poor, single adults from services regardless of whether or not they are fathers. A majority of men in the current research had a family member who had been on welfare, and nearly half were the sons of AFDC recipients. Most of these men expressed strong feelings about work and the role of fathers, but they face severe personal barriers to success in today's economy. This research shows some of the obstacles and outcomes these young men face, but much more needs to be learned about their employment, paternity patterns, and welfare use if we are to reduce poverty among families.

Because the cost of GA programs is borne entirely by states or local jurisdictions, its elimination has increasingly been suggested as a way to reduce expenditures in the effort to balance budgets. Since 1989, at least five states have eliminated GA benefits for employable adults and families, six others now limit the length of assistance for able-bodied and, in some cases, disabled adults, and still others have reduced the amount of benefits to some or all of their caseload (Nichols and Porter, 1995). In fiscal year 1992 alone, nearly 450,000 recipients lost assistance when programs were cut or eligibility was changed. The impact of these cuts on recipients was not considered. Rather, it was assumed that they would find employment (Danziger and Kossoudji, 1994; Nichols and Porter, 1995).

Such decisions are short-sighted. The personal and social consequences of eliminating benefits for more than 82,000 single persons and childless couples in Michigan who were considered employable have been great. Both Hansen (1992a, b) and Danziger and Kossoudji (1994) find evidence of increased homelessness,

hunger, use of emergency room services, and use of nonprofit service providers among the former recipients.

This increase in homelessness and destitution has led the state to shift costs to local and federal governments, through the increased use of homeless shelters and support services, and to nonprofit agencies, through the increased use of food pantries, soup kitchens, and emergency rooms (Hansen, 1992a; Danziger and Kossoudji, 1994). These cuts did not take into account the long-term costs that are borne by society in the form of increased poverty, focusing instead on short-term gain in a jurisdiction's balanced budget. If their access to services were to be increased rather than decreased, many recipients of GA could become employed former recipients and taxpayers, and thereby increase their contributions to their families. The long-term gains for society would far outweigh the short-term costs.

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